DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 284 SO 007 982

AUTHOR Yandell, Wilson; And Others
TITLE The School Unit as a Changing Teaching-Learning Environment; Joint Consultation by a Mental Health Consultant and Curriculum Specialists.
INSTITUTION Diablo Valley Education Project, Orinda, Calif.
PUB DATE 8 Apr 74
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; Behavior Patterns; *Change Agents; Change Strategies; Conflict; *Conflict Resolution; *Consultation Programs; *Curriculum Planning; Educational Change; Elementary Education; Global Approach; Problem Solving; Social Studies; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

In order to promote change in teaching about conflict and war, a Mt. Diablo California Unified School District elementary school established an ongoing consultation program for considering teacher values and curriculum content. The plan called for a collaborative effort in combining the methodology of mental health consultation with resource persons familiar with social studies curriculum and inservice teacher training. Consultation meetings with faculty, principal, and consultant team occurred twice a month for seven months. The process of the meetings, which was to determine the direction of the goals, was left to the faculty participants. Over a period of months resistance among the participants developed within the group process. Certain issues were not talked about, as goal setting began to take on less importance in the meetings than the introduction of new curriculum content. Resistance developed to the leadership of the principal. The results of the program were both positive and negative. Whereas progress was made in the effort to implement new curriculum ideas, many of the participants felt it did not go far enough in values and goal clarification. Most of the teachers and the principal felt they were more understanding and comfortable with others at the end of the program. All identified a greater understanding and ease with the presence of conflict after working through conflict situations within the group process. The results indicated the possibility that the school could be the environment and unit of change for more effective resolution of conflict. (DE)

ED 099284

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The School Unit as a Changing Teaching-Learning Environment: Joint Consultation by a Mental Health Consultant and Curriculum Specialists

Wilson Yandell
University of California, Berkeley

Robert E. Freeman
George N. Larson
Diablo Valley Education Project, Orinda, California

SP007982

Introduction

The collaboration of the consultant team in the work to be described began with efforts some years earlier to understand, and subsequently to promote change in the manner in which issues related to teaching about war were pursued in our schools. Among the principles guiding these efforts have been a basic assumption that alternatives to war must be found in order for mankind to survive; furthermore, that changing social institutions should enhance or preserve democratic values. It had seemed that efforts within teacher education at the level of such global considerations tended to attract and to involve primarily teachers already committed to these principles, or to vague concepts of teaching about "peace". In addition, work toward involving teachers in change in curriculum content alone seemed not to regularly result in sustained change in teacher performance.

It was the observation of the child psychiatrist on the evolving team, when serving as a consultant to inservice training workshops for teachers sponsored by the Diablo Valley Education Project, that a shortcoming of those efforts was the absence of an opportunity for ongoing consultation to the

teachers in their efforts to implement new ideas, whether about consideration of values or about specific curriculum. These considerations led to a plan for a collaborative effort combining the methodology of mental health consultation with input available from resource persons conversant with social studies curriculum and inservice training for teachers.

Our planning was influenced by two additional factors. These were, firstly, that much of the successful work of the Diablo Valley Education Project had been geared at the level of secondary schools. Yet we shared the conviction that, in terms of the aims of the work sponsored by the project, it was very important to begin at the elementary level. It was the conviction of the mental health consultant on the team that the best way to involve elementary teachers would be through unstructured meetings in which the teachers themselves could influence the course of and content of the meetings. The second factor influencing planning was the hope that an entire elementary school faculty could become involved in order that we might explore the possibility of influencing change in an entire school unit.

Goals

Thus the consultant team had identified certain specific goals prior to negotiating for a school site and a faculty committed to participation. We foresaw the opportunity for first, the exploration of school task-related problems and conflict in the setting which involved an entire faculty. Secondly, we anticipated an opportunity to foster the communication among and integration of effort within the entire faculty in a manner commonly identified as that of staff development. Thirdly, we hoped that in the course of these meetings there might be a provision of opportunities for the introduction of, and stimuli promoting, utilization of resources for curriculum change. Finally, we hoped

that we might explore how the consultant team could develop and integrate future efforts toward mutually complementary work in teacher training.

Implicit in these goals and plan for the structure of the meeting was no effort to limit and focus the content and process of the meetings specifically towards curriculum change as it involved teaching about social change and alternatives to war. Equally implicit in the sponsorship of the undertaking by the Diablo Valley Education Project was an expectation that inevitably issues would arise which offered opportunities in those directions. Fundamental to the undertaking was the belief that a goal of change in social studies curriculum content in itself is not enough. For youth to develop both the understandings and the motivation necessary for pursuit of alternatives to violence, youth must learn how to adapt to rapid change and to engage in the management of ongoing conflict. Conflict is seen as a universal element in human experience. The school and the classroom provide arenas of shifting conflict and opportunity.

Two factors deemed of major importance in learning principles of conflict management as an outcome of classroom experience are the impact of affective and experiential learning, and the interpersonal process within the classroom. Teachers generally need help in learning to be aware of themselves as instruments in the teaching-learning process. Such awareness may be of particular importance if the teacher is to respond judiciously in the multitude of conflict laden situations confronting him in the school. Only then is the teacher likely to foster the development within individual youngsters of a capacity to manage his own personal conflicts, and to promote within society principles of conflict management. Also important toward that end is the teachers' commitment to teaching cognitively about conflict, and to provide learning opportunities which consciously involve conflict and problems requiring conflict resolution or management.

Steps in Implementation

It was with all these considerations in mind, then, that the consultant team approached the Consultant in Elementary Education of the Mt. Diablo Unified School District in an effort to locate an elementary school faculty whom he felt might be responsive to our plan. Rather promptly, a school was identified through the school principal, who in his second year at the school was very much interested in efforts to better integrate his faculty. A meeting with the consultant team, the school principal, and a district school psychologist assigned to the school provided an opportunity for the consultants to clarify their background, interests, and goals as well as a general plan for a series of meetings. From there, plans proceeded to the establishment of two meetings in May of 1972 with the entire school faculty to explore the interests of the faculty and their questions, as well as to set forth the interests and background of the consultant group to the faculty.

It was agreed within the consultant team that the mental health consultant would be the moderator of meetings, and would make an effort to be responsive to both the interests of the teachers and the other members of the consultant team. It was understood that in including the principal as well as his faculty, we introduced an additional element for potential tension within the meetings, but one essential in goals to influence the school unit itself. The general response of the teachers was one of interest and expectation, and by the end of the initial meeting, it was agreed that there would be a plan for fifteen meetings to continue through the end of the school year 1972-73, meetings to be held twice monthly, on Mondays, from 3-5 p.m. Teachers were free to obtain college credit by registering through St. Mary's College, or could obtain district credit for advancement in salary level within the district. Both, of course, remained optional.

It was planned that, at the second meeting to be held in the spring, there would be a game provided by the consultant team. At the second meeting, the game "Cooperation Squares"* was played, which involved dividing the large group into small teams, and in which the mental health consultant participated on one of the teams with teacher group members. In the game, it was necessary for there to be blind and nonverbal but written cooperative efforts in a timed competition with other teams. In the de-briefing discussion, there were many stimulating questions asked, and many ways in which teachers wished to consider using such a game in their own classroom. The curriculum consultants were able to offer multiple levels of questioning in the kinds of conflict situations and issues for cooperation raised by the game experience. There was general regret that the time limitations prevented a further exploration of the questions raised.

By the time of regrouping in the fall for firming the plan, registering for the course, and organizing the effort for the year, there were several changes in the group. The school psychologist was not in attendance, and there was an addition of a resource teacher new to the faculty. Approximately seventeen of the twenty-two teachers on the faculty of the school had decided to attend the sessions in addition to the resource teacher and the principal. This meant that our goal of attaining total faculty involvement had not been met, but seemed at a gratifying level, nonetheless.

Content and Process of the Consultation

After some strain in those initial meetings as goals and procedures were clarified, teachers began to identify problems in managing children collectively, particularly in playground situations as of special concerns. These concerns seemed most prominent among the fourth and fifth grade level teachers. Discussion gradually shifted to concerns about specific children with severe individual

*Published by National Training Laboratories

problems. It began to be recognized within the group that most of the problems seemed to be introduced by upper grade level teachers, and, furthermore, it became evident that the only teachers not choosing to take part in the group meetings were several of those teachers working in the primary level.

As the meetings proceeded, there developed a feeling of increased communication among the staff, and some sense that there was in the meetings a unique opportunity for the total staff to communicate. However, there was the wish expressed on repeated occasions for more concrete solutions to problems. The resource teacher seemed clearly to be seeking a greater response from faculty, and often became a spokesman for voicing the needs of youngsters in humanistic terms. Ultimately this led to clash between the resource teacher and one of the more outspoken classroom teachers over a problem youngster with whom both were working.

The focus of the meetings had been largely on the level of mental health consultation, and not curriculum development. Discussion between the consultants during the interim between meetings was not always as adequate as it needed to be. There were several efforts by the Diablo Valley Education Project director to offer inputs that were not met with responsiveness by the teachers. At one meeting late in the fall, this consultant asked to introduce a short film at the beginning of the session for the purpose of obtaining some evaluation of the film as well as to generate teacher interest in materials. While the film seemed to many, including the mental health consultant, a comic and charming exposition of ideas about world community and ecological concerns, it was totally rejected by many of the teachers, who thought it too threatening for their students. They were also somehow put off by an intrusion on their initiative in determining the course of the meeting. There were other unsuccessful efforts by the curriculum consultants to introduce

specific directions for the thinking of the teachers, or for the introduction of resource material. Yet within the group there was some dissatisfaction about the way things were going, and a wish expressed to try another simulation as a basis for seeing groups interact in the use of power.* This simulation was generally less successful than the game attempted during the previous spring, and there was clearly not enough debriefing time.

At this point, which followed a longer gap in the interval between meetings because of the holidays of Christmas and New Year's, there was an evident retreat within the group from open communication. There was more dissatisfaction with what was occurring, as well as more wish for content. As the change of semesters occurred, there seemed to be greater fatigue within the faculty, and the feeling that everything about their jobs demanded too much of them. Within the group, there was a feeling among some of the teachers that they seemed to talk most and to carry the group, a fact that several seemed to resent. There was, furthermore, an implied hint that certain things were not being talked about. Thus at this point, approximately five to six months from the beginning of our work in the fall, a general retreat from group cohesion was evident. The curriculum consultants, particularly, seemed at this point to feel discouraged and wished more and more to offer curriculum ideas to the group. The mental health consultant felt that the resistance in group process was something to be expected, understood, and hopefully worked through. However, the process of working through was discouragingly slow.

There was at this point the introduction of two social studies curriculum ideas, supported by reference materials from the consultants, which seemed to bear more fruit than earlier efforts in that direction. The group of teachers became interested in Bruner's curriculum, "Man, A Course of Study."[3]** It was

* Star Power, available from Simile II, P.O. Box 1023, La Jolla, Calif. 92037
** Developed by Education Development Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts

agreed to invite a consultant from the county office of education to show a film from that curriculum and to discuss the range and nature of that curriculum. There was also interest in a curriculum on human development[2] proposed for grades one through six, with several teachers indicating a response and wish to explore that curriculum. In a sense, then, the group seemed to move more away from an introspective or communicative effort among themselves and to seek outside sources of stimulation at this time. Four of the teachers who had seemed enthused earlier in the year began to sound more negative and less interested during this period. Subsequently, one of these teachers withdrew from the group entirely to have major surgery, which prevented her from completing the teaching year. Two others, an E-H teacher and a fourth grade teacher began to be chronically absent from the group. A fifth grade teacher seemed depressed and negative when present, though she too was often absent.

Dynamically, there seemed to be at least three major ways in which group members responded to the felt sense of impasse. A few became discouraged and withdrew. Most group members sought to shift attention from process to content. They began to anticipate the new year ahead in terms of curriculum planning and change, discussion of grade level problems, and the need for more time to meet together. It was of interest in this process that repeated efforts by the consultant team to support a clear goal-setting process regarding priorities within the faculty about academics (as opposed to affective goals) met with failure in the general discussion. This may have been a result of the third major response in the group: the mounting tension about challenge of the principal's leadership.

A number of issues that recurred seemed to challenge the quality of leadership within the school, and seemed to cry out for some administrative reaction both within the meeting and outside it. The consultants hoped that in a

separate meeting arranged with the principal they might help him clarify how the principal saw his role as an administrator. The principal neither seemed to question his own role function nor to perceive the challenge developing in the group. With three meetings to go, the resource teacher and that teacher with whom she had earlier clashed over a youngster, joined forces to push for re-examining both communication within the group and its need as a faculty for leadership in the school. In the final two meetings, the principal was criticized by still others in the faculty. They sought to pin him down on questions of followup. They felt that he would indicate what he planned to do, but gave them no evidence of how his plans were to be implemented. The principal began to get the message that he failed to communicate his intentions adequately, and to respond with more concrete direction.

It was in this setting that one of the first grade teachers introduced with enthusiasm a new sequential curriculum in mathematics which she had discovered. She succeeded in involving in the group discussion other teachers in plans and cooperation regarding that curriculum. It was necessary to involve the principal to organize parent cooperation and help in implementing the mathematics curriculum, and it was clear that the teachers felt his support. There was exploration of a new direction for science curriculum discussed in the meetings. Several teachers were actively following through on their interest in "Man: A Course of Study" with intentions to utilize that curriculum in the fall. Here too, the principal was supportive of their interest by his promise of school budgeted funds for some of the necessary materials. There seemed to be a new base for exploring utilization of the resource teacher in the year ahead. The resource teacher began to do some team teaching with a few individual teachers. There was a returned sense of sharing and cohesion within the group, and some capacity to review the experience

of the year with the recognition of how it had been difficult to broach some issues before the group. There was expression by several individual teachers of a wish to continue with the meetings in the following year, an issue which could not be dealt with conclusively.

Follow-up and Evaluation: Faculty Response

At a meeting with the school principal held in November 1973 we were able to learn that there had in his view been a number of specific changes within the school which he related to the growth enhanced by the consultation experience of the previous year. These included a number of major shifts in grade level placement on the part of the teachers; in each instance, the principal felt, with much more satisfying work for the teacher, and for the school. There had been progress made in the effort to implement new curriculum ideas in math, science, and social studies. There had been some effort to team teach and open up classrooms, not attempted before in this school; and the principal was candid in noting a change in his own approach to administration, which involved much more attention to communicating with his staff his own intentions as well as his expectations of them. The principal expressed some feeling that particularly in relation to certain teachers on his staff, his own communication with them had greatly improved. There was consistently better use of the resource teacher as the new year was beginning.

The staff of the Educational Testing Service responded to the efforts of the consultant team to establish a format for retrospective evaluation of the team's effort by arranging to interview the principal and several groups of teachers identified by him during January-February, 1974. The evaluation took the form of an interview based upon a questionnaire developed to reflect those goals which determined initial participation or non-participation by the teacher, outcomes of the experience, and evaluation of content and process of the experience.

The principal himself conveyed, in addition to those impressions already offered to the consultant team, satisfaction with the overall results of the meetings. He emphasized changes in his perception of his own leadership role and an improved relationship with his faculty. He recognized his own improved capacity to listen to others. However he would have liked more direction or leadership from the consultant team.

Only one of those teachers identified by the principal as most involved would not choose to repeat the experience. She reacted with depression and discouragement to the resistances she perceived in the group and felt failed by the consultant team. Her response was to withdraw from investing in the group experience and to see the outcomes for the faculty overall in negative terms. Another in this group identified the process as characterized by nothing happening. Yet this teacher saw most of the outcomes proposed as achieved or somewhat achieved, found the experience useful to individuals, and leading to curriculum change. She, as would others, would recommend and repeat the experience. Two other teachers in this "most involved" group found their expectations unmet, but for different reasons. One felt the group leaders should have offered more, the other feeling that the faculty group failed to utilize the opportunity and needed more time. The latter teacher, while evaluating the actual outcome in negative terms, felt longer and more persistent effort in the same direction was necessary. Both these teachers would recommend continuing the effort.

It is of interest that three teachers identified by the principal as semi-involved were those most positive about the gains achieved in the overall experience. In this group was the only teacher whose expectations were "more than met." All felt more comfortable in relation to other faculty and that they were now more accepting and understanding of others. This group most clearly

identified greater ease with the presence of conflict, and recognition of change in the quality of leadership on the part of the principal.

Those teachers who had chosen not to participate seemed to have surprisingly little awareness of what had been the experience of the group participating. This group seemed to recognize more openness to curriculum change and communication among the faculty, as well as greater rapport between faculty and principal. However they seemed not to consider that these changes might have evolved from the group consultation experience. While they denied negative feedback from participants, the non-participants were unwilling to recommend the group consultation experience for themselves or others.

Both the principal and all teacher participants would have preferred more direction and leadership from the consultant team. Comments asking for more "generalizing from the specific," for more structure, and for more content were consistent responses. All participants regarded the meetings as dealing more often with problems encountered at the upper grade levels than at the primary grade levels. Therefore there was a greater sense of usefulness and participation among the faculty working in the upper grades.

Follow-up Evaluation: Consultant Team

For the consultant team, the effort provided similarly mixed results, generally positive. For each there was a genuine learning experience. The curriculum consultants identify a new awareness and sensitivity to group process, with the resistances inherent in that process, and the need for working through. They believe they are bringing to subsequent teacher training efforts greater recognition of the need to mobilize the identified interests and problems within the trainee group. They also believe they are more sensitive in responding to the felt need of the group, rather than the agenda of the consultant. The

psychiatrist involved gained first-hand knowledge of curriculum materials and techniques for games and simulations not previously experienced.

All grappled with dilemmas about process versus content in the course of the meetings. Early efforts at introduction of content seemed rejected by the group. Later when working through the resistance that developed within the group process seemed most needed, the wish for content by the group became predominant. As a team, the consultants felt unable to collaborate as much as they wished because of other commitments, and recognize that more "homework" would have resulted in a more integrated team approach. That in turn might have provided stimulation found lacking by the faculty group.

Problems Influencing Outcomes

Specific problems which certainly impeded the process, and limited its success, included the large size of the group (19-24 persons present) and the relatively brief time span of approximately seven months for the undertaking. As may be the rule in such situations, efforts by the consultant team to clarify their perceptions about goals and directions for the group left many unclear about how to use the experience. Efforts to stimulate the group to define problems and explore their own goals only began to become effective near the end of the experience when greater "risk-taking" by individual group members occurred. Equally characteristic was the tendency for a few group members to accept responsibility for active participation while others remained passive. Associated resentments by the activists against those who were silent, and against the activists as monopolizing the meetings were divisive and had not been worked through by the termination of the group.

The consultant team and at least some of the faculty group would have chosen to continue the effort, but funding was not available. The consultant team

has not continued to function as such, because of factors external to the experience described. These factors, which include a career change for one consultant (Larson), and major demands for time and energy in other directions in the careers of the other two (Freeman and Yandell) may only serve to rationalize our failure to act. We tell ourselves that we would like to try again--that we could do a better job of integrating our efforts, of stimulating the group to find its own direction, and of resolving more satisfactorily the dilemma of process versus content.

Other Approaches

Any evaluation of this kind of effort to promote change needs to be made in a context of alternative approaches. Included among these alternatives would be Teacher Effectiveness Training as set forth by Thomas Gordon,[5] the Values Clarification programs,[6] Glasser's work with teachers, which is said to lead to Schools Without Failure.[4] The range of alternative approaches extends from standard course work and workshops offered teachers, to more conventional mental health consultation, and on to group encounter. The work described by Bennis, Benne and Chinn and their contributing authors in The Planning of Change,[1] as well as workers influenced by the National Training Laboratories, and systems approach to group work provide additional insights into the requirements and methodology of the task.

Conclusion

It will remain true that each of us must bring to our own efforts those skills and the knowledge acquired in prior experience. In the present work, the consultant team sought successfully to learn from each other, and to explore ways to extend the limits of the opportunity in consultation each could offer independently. As is usually true of learning situations, we believe we will

succeed more in the future as a result of gain from this experience. In the practical work of promoting change, we need to find ways of personally involving multiple individuals in the change process. Ideas and abstract values are not learned independent of the manner in which they are presented or taught.

In seeking ways to utilize our professional knowledge and skill in the service of concerns about the management of conflict in man's affairs, we focus on the need for each person to learn differently about the presence and uses of conflict. It may be that the schools as an institution and the process of public education cannot be instruments to that end. We hope they can. The efforts described here represent one more step in moving from motivations arising out of global concerns to work focused at the more practical level of everyday life experience.

Bibliography

1. Bennis, Benne and Chinn, The Planning of Change; New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1961, 1969.

2. Bessell, Harold and Palomares, Waldo, Human Development Program, Human Development Training Institute, San Diego, California, 1970.

3. Bruner, Jerome, Toward a Theory of Instruction, W. W. Norton & Co., Inc. New York, 1969.

4. Glasser, William, Schools Without Failure, New York, Harper & Row, 1969.

5. Gordon, Thomas, Teacher Effectiveness Training, 1968, available at 110 South Euclid Avenue, Pasadena, California.

6. Simon, Sidney B., Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students, Hart, 1972.